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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 000018

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SUBJECT: CHAVEZ ANNOUNCES HE WILL SLOW DOWN THE REVOLUTION

REF: CARACAS 000014

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Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT DOWNES,
REASON 1.4 (D)

¶1. (C) Summary. During his January 6 "Alo, Presidente" broadcast, President Chavez said he plans to apply the brakes to his Bolivarian revolution after the defeat of his proposed changes to the 1999 Constitution. He and his new cabinet will not change ideology, but will "review, rectify, and re-launch" Chavez' "21st Century Socialism." Chavez also urged his supporters to consolidate the formation of his United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) and focus on state and local elections in 2008 to avert a U.S.-sponsored "counterrevolution." Contrary to his 2007 rhetorical attacks on pro-government parties that did not merge with the PSUV, Chavez said his new party would be open to forming an electoral alliance with such parties. Chavez did not announce how or when he intends to try again to change the constitution. He appears to be regrouping after a number of setbacks in 2007 and trying to strengthen his base. End Summary.

The Three R's

¶2. (SBU) President Chavez hosted his weekly government television talk-show "Alo, Presidente" January 6 from a new Socialist Ideology Training Center in Miranda State, his first such broadcast in three months. Chavez' reshuffled cabinet (with mostly the same faces) and Miranda State Governor Diosdado Cabello attended. Limiting himself to three and one-half hours of air time (his broadcasts in September were around eight hours), the Venezuelan president said that in 2008, his administration would follow the "three R's": review, rectification, and re-launch. Chavez stressed that he is still pursuing a socialist ideology, but intends to apply "brakes" to his Bolivarian revolution after the defeat of his proposals for constitutional change in December 2007. He noted that at this time many Venezuelans were not yet ready for the "revolution."

¶3. (SBU) Chavez also took stock of the "five motors" of the socialist revolution he announced in January 2007. Chavez noted that the failure of his constitutional reform package (the second motor) effectively undermined his efforts to institute a "new geometry of power" between the central and state and local governments (the fourth motor). He also conceded that the defeat diluted the potential impact of the

Enabling Law (the first motor). Prior to the referendum defeat, Chavez had said he had some 100 decree-laws ready to promulgate. Nevertheless, Chavez reiterated his interest in promoting a public "Morality and Enlightenment" ideology campaign (third motor) and said he will review the ongoing work of community councils (fifth motor).

State and Local Elections

¶4. (SBU) During the broadcast, Chavez urged his supporters to prepare for state and local elections to be held by early November. Reflecting on the results of the constitutional referendum, Chavez suggested the opposition could conceivably win the governorships of Miranda and Carabobo and the Caracas mayoral seat. Chavez warned that the opposition would launch the "counterrevolution" from such places and try to remove him from office. He also told his supporters not to underestimate "our adversaries," which he said enjoyed the support of the "American empire." Chavez accused the USG of waging a "media war" to depict him as a tyrant.

¶5. (SBU) The Venezuelan president also underscored the importance of consolidating the creation of his single, pro-government party, the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV). He said he would attend the PSUV Founding Congress in Caracas that begins on January 12. Asserting that he did not intend to hand-pick candidates for state and local races, Chavez said the PSUV party bases should be responsible for choosing the best candidates. Chavez also said the PSUV would be open to forging electoral alliances with other pro-government parties, such as Patria Para Todos (PPT) and the Communist Party (PCV).

Limited Amnesty

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¶6. (SBU) Chavez deflected criticism that his December 31 Amnesty Decree did not cover political prisoners, such as Police Commissioners Simonovis, Forero, and Vivas, or University of the Andes (ULA) student leader Nixon Moreno. He distinguished between those who signed the Carmona Decree that formed the short-lived government after Chavez' brief ouster in April 2002 and those accused of "human rights violations." Chavez insisted his amnesty would only cover those accused of "political" crimes and not those involved in "criminal" cases involving rape and murder. (Note: The government accuses the police commissioners of ordering shooting deaths during an April 11, 2002 march on the Presidential Palace and accuses Moreno of assault and rape of a police officer. These charges are widely perceived to be unsubstantiated and politically motivated. End Note).

Comment

¶7. (C) For the moment, Chavez is deploying more moderate rhetoric than the harsh and divisive language he used in the run-up to the December 2007 referendum defeat of his proposed changes to the constitution. His calibrated message also contrasts sharply with the radical language he deployed one year ago, just after his re-election as president. As he often does when he faces opposition, Chavez is signaling a tactical retreat to allow his supporters to regroup. Chavez' conciliatory tone toward allied parties such as Patria Para Todos (PPT) and the Communist Party is markedly different from his rhetorical attacks on those parties and the Podemos party in 2007. Chavez appears much more eager to maintain PPT and PCV support in the wake of Podemos' active participation in the "No" campaign in the December 2007 constitutional referendum. The PPT Secretary General was

elected Second Vice President of the National Assembly the day before the "Alo, Presidente" broadcast. Interestingly, Chavez did not announce how or when he intends to seek changes to the 1999 Constitution again, including removing the two-term presidential limit. Instead, Chavez simply said, for now, he plans to make the most of his remaining five years in office.

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